

VZCZCXYZ0012  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHZP #0580/01 1981436  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH(CCY ADDED CAPTION AD00B67736/MSI1354 510)  
R 161436Z JUL 08  
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2288  
INFO RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS PANAMA 000580

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D COPY - SENSITIVE CAPTION ADDED

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PM](#)

SUBJECT: PANAMA: 2009 NATIONAL ELECTION VOTER DEMOGRAPHICS

-----  
SUMMARY  
-----

¶1. (U) Panama is gearing up for the May 3, 2009 general election, in which Panamanians will choose all of their elected leaders - from President through National Assembly Deputies to mayors and city councilmen -- for a five-year term. The Tribunal Electoral (TE) released on May 25 the preliminary voter registry, painting a picture of the 2.1 million strong members of the voting-eligible public for whose attention the candidates will vie. The ruling Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) is in the lead as far as registered voters.

-----  
2.1 million voters and 767 seats  
-----

¶2. (U) According to Panama's Tribunal Electoral (TE), 2,163,377 citizens (out of 3.3 million) will be eligible to vote in the May 3, 2009 general elections. Panamanians will choose 767 national and local elected officials, from President to National Assembly representatives to mayors to city councilmen for 5-year terms. Panamanians vote only once every five years to select individuals for all of the country's elected offices.

¶3. (U) The eight parties had from June 1 to July 15 to challenge the voter registry and the data released on May 28. The TE has until October 1 to examine these challenges. Later in the fall, the TE will allow further challenges by individuals who want to be included in the rolls - people turning 18 before election day, for example. Voters who will turn 18 before election day in 2009 will be allowed to vote, although they must apply directly to the Padron Electoral by October 15, 2008 to receive their ID card (cedula) and be included in the voter registry. The TE will also purge the rolls of individuals who should be excluded, such as recently deceased individuals. The final voter registry will be released on February 3, 2009.

¶4. (U) The individual party primaries will take place from June through October, most notably the ruling Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) which will hold its primary on September 7. The opposition's largest party, the Panamenista Party, recently held its primary on July 6, and the second largest opposition party, the Democratic Change party (CD), will choose its candidates on August 3.

-----  
Reaching Out to Young Voters

-----  
¶5. (U) One in five Panamanian voters is between 18 and 25 years of age, and 53% are 40 or under. Candidates have noticed, and are reaching out to young voters with rallies, concerts, Facebook pages and internet postings. As Panamanian general elections take place only once every five years, many of these voters up to the age of 22 years will be voting for the first time. The TE expects more than 60,000 new voters to cast their ballots for the first time.

-----  
Eight Parties, but PRD Rules  
-----

¶6. (U) Eight registered political parties will vie for seats up and down the ticket, although the larger parties - the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) and the Panamenista Party, as well as political newcomer Democratic Change (CD), will likely be the only parties with full tickets in every precinct of Panama.

¶7. (SBU) Only 41% of voters are registered with any political party, and roughly half of these voters (592,778) were registered with the ruling PRD as of May 28. (NOTE: The rolls of the ruling party tend to swell after each election as new members join to obtain jobs in government. END NOTE) Since the release of the voter registry, the PRD has been working hard to register new voters. On July 14, the TE reported that the PRD has registered 10,122 new members, while the Panamenista Party has lost 2,697 members and the Democratic Change party lost 1,361 voters in recent months.

-----  
The Voters, Who Are They?  
-----

¶8. (U) Almost half of all eligible voters (1,058,476) live in Panama province, more specifically 28% of all nationwide voters live in two large districts within Panama province - Panama Centro (18%) and San Miguelito (10%). The bulk of the voters living outside of Panama province are in the rural provinces of Cocle, Colon and Veraguas, that combine to make up 21% of the voting population. The TE lists 1,615 voters living abroad, the vast majority (69%) in the United States, although the actual number of eligible voters living abroad is likely much higher. This total is artificially low due to difficulties registering to vote overseas. Forty-nine percent (1,079,954) of all eligible voters are women.

¶9. (U) Voter turnout is normally robust in general elections, and the Tribunal Electoral expects a turnout of more than 75% in May, tracking with prior elections. In 2004, turnout was 76.9% and in 1999 turnout was 76.2% of the voting public.

-----  
Prisoners Can Vote, But Not Noriega  
-----

¶10. (U) Excluded from voting are 55,092 citizens who have not voted in the last three elections and have not applied to the TE to reinstate their status. Among them, the media noted, is former Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega, who did not vote in the elections of 1994, 1999 or 2003. However, due to a penal reform law of 2006, for the first time prisoners - both those in pre-trial detention and convicts - will be eligible to vote. However, the prohibition on voting still stands for persons convicted of electoral crimes. (NOTE: Campaigning may be difficult in prisons, as TE regulations do not prohibit candidates from visiting prisons, but do prohibit campaigning. END NOTE)

-----  
Comment  
-----

¶11. (U) COMMENT: This is the first in an occasional series of cables that will endeavor to set the stage for the 2009 Panamanian elections. In the future, we plan to broaden the reader's knowledge of the Panamanian election process by, among other issues, delving further into the campaigns' efforts to reach the youth vote, addressing the difficulties of independent candidates, and providing a primer on the distribution of National Assembly seats. END COMMENT.  
MESA